

IMMIGRANTS

ON THE THRESHOLD JUDITH T. SHUVAL

∞ INTRODUCTION BY LOUIS GUTTMAN



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Immigrants on the Threshold is the first large-scale empirical study of the adjustment problems of immigrants. The extraordinary phenomenon of immigration to Israel has made possible this searching study of people in transit, their response to the strain of transit, their first efforts at acculturation, and their occupational aspirations and mobility. Judith T. Shuval reports here on the attitudes and behavior of almost two thousand people from twenty countries during their first year in the new state.

In an outstanding way, this book presents a theoretical framework rich with empirical findings. No other work on immigration approaches this study either in the depth of the theoretical analysis or in the design and execution of the sociopsychological field work. Presented here are the only available data that give a representative picture of the social and psychological problems of immigrants.

The theoretical approach of this book, the sociopsychological hypotheses formulated, and the conclusions reached are all substantial contributions to the general field of social psychology. This book sets a high standard for empirical research in sociology.

Immigrants on the Threshold answers several primary questions about the attitudes and behavior patterns of immigrants:

What factors in the immigrant's past and present condition his response to the strain of transit?

What is the role of commitment to the goals of the host society?

What is the role of various social and economic backgrounds in determining patterns of acculturation?

What factors affect the occupational aspirations and social mobility patterns of immigrants?

The Study

In order to answer these essential questions, Shuval designed a questionnaire covering six major topics: occupational problems, social relations in the transit camps, morale, attitude toward the host society, acculturation, and level of information about Israel. An important part of the research design is the systematic sampling of the immigrants and a comparison with a control group of the old-time Jewish population of Palestine. Interviews—in nine languages and dialects—with immigrants were run parallel with those run among a cross section of the entire Israeli population. Of special methodological significance is the employment of the "conditional correlation" technique previously suggested by Guttman and Lazarsfeld.

Shuval takes a new point of departure for her analysis; she goes more deeply into certain aspects of the data and presents some remarkable findings of general sociological importance. Her basic emphasis is to distinguish within the immigrants the variables that lead to quicker or slower acculturation: the commitment to Zionism and knowledge of Israeli goals, experience in a Nazi concentration camp and other trauma, and ambiguity of plans for settlement and employment.

Of Contemporary Interest

Israel continues to admit and absorb immigrants, and, however much the external trappings of immigrant absorption have changed during fifteen years of statehood, many of the fundamental social and psychological problems remain the same. In addition to interesting the social scientist concerned with immigration and acculturation, this book will appeal to all students of contemporary Israel and the Middle East.

Immigrants on the Threshold was prepared under the auspices of The Israel Institute of Applied Social Research.

The Author

Judith T. Shuval is a research associate at The Israel Institute of Applied Social Research, Jerusalem, and teaches in the Sociology Department of the Hebrew University. She is American born and educated, having received her Ph.D. from Radcliffe College in 1955. Since 1949 she has lived and engaged in research in Israel, working in the fields of immigration, acculturation, and, more recently, medical sociology. She received the Helen L. DeRoy Award of the Society for the Study of Social Problems for a paper based on Chapter 6 of this book.

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